

Westward to the Future

By Matt Hiebert

Remembering the Journey that Defined a Nation



Lewis



Clark



PAINTING "LEWIS AND CLARK: THE DEPARTURE FROM ST. CHARLES, MAY 21, 1804" BY GARY R. LUCY. COURTESY OF THE GARY R. LUCY GALLERY, INC., WASHINGTON, MO – WWW.GARYLUCY.COM
PAINTING ON CONTENTS PAGE: "LEWIS AND CLARK: THE FINAL BRIEFING AT ST. CHARLES, MAY 21, 1804" BY GARY R. LUCY.

The Missouri Department of Transportation has a lot in common with the Lewis and Clark expedition. Like the Corps of Discovery, MoDOT is charged with mapping the state and helping travelers find the best route to their destination.

With that in mind, it's no surprise that MoDOT is playing an important role in the bicentennial commemoration of the journey.

As part of the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Commission, MoDOT is working with other Missouri state agencies to make sure tourists, visitors and citizens can follow – as closely as possible – the Corps' path across Missouri.

The special commission was established by Gov. Mel Carnahan in 1998 to coordinate commemoration efforts between state agencies, local governments and historical societies.

"It was an honor to serve on the bicentennial commission," said former MoDOT Director Henry Hungerbeeler. "Our work with other state agencies will hopefully make the commemoration an event worthy of the Corps of Discovery's accomplishments."

Mark Kross, assistant to the director of project development at MoDOT, says that although MoDOT wasn't in the original order creating the bicentennial commission, the department's role quickly became crucial to the commemoration.

"MoDOT was not in the original executive order that created the Missouri bicentennial commission," Kross said. "Immediately that was viewed by our sister agencies and the bicentennial commission as an oversight, because not only was MoDOT the one most involved with providing access to Lewis and Clark sites and events, but in a lot of ways the expedition was a transportation event."

It could even be argued that transportation was the primary inspiration for the expedition. In President Thomas Jefferson's original letter to Meriwether Lewis, he says:

"The Object of your mission is to explore the Missouri river & such principal stream of it as by its course and communication with the waters of the Pacific ocean, whether the Columbia, Oregon, Colorado or any other river may offer the most direct & practicable water communication across this continent for the purpose of commerce."

In modern language: Find the best passage by water from St. Louis to the Pacific Ocean so we can open new trade routes.



As most people know, that didn't happen. The truth was that there was no "direct & practicable water communication across the continent." It would be another 65 years before anything but people and animal power moved travelers from the Midwest to the West Coast.

That doesn't diminish the expedition's success, of course. They obviously couldn't discover something that didn't exist. And the scientific, geographical and diplomatic

achievements of the journey easily eclipsed any of its shortcomings.

Nonetheless, it was Jefferson's attempt to improve transportation routes that got the oars in the water. He wanted to know the best way to get across the growing nation.

In much the same manner, MoDOT is marking and mapping the Lewis and Clark route through Missouri so that modern travelers can easily follow in the footsteps of the explorers.

Working with other state agencies and local governments, MoDOT is helping point the way to significant Corps of Discovery sites.

Meriwether Lewis' telescope

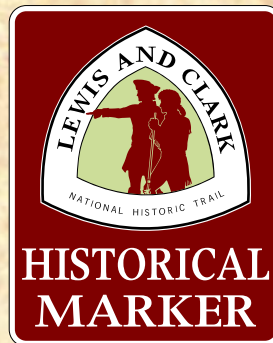
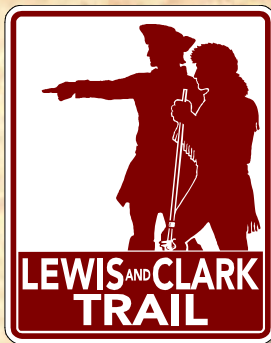




During their trek through the state, the Corps had several experiences in Missouri worth mention. At least one of them was life threatening.

Many people don't know it, but the expedition almost didn't make it out of the region. Ten days into the journey, the group was exploring an area near St. Albans in east-central Missouri. Lewis had climbed a bluff above a place called Tavern Cave for a better look at the land. According to William Clark's journal entry, Lewis lost his footing "...near falling from the Pinecles of rocks 300 feet, he caught at 20 foot."

Fortunately, Lewis didn't plummet 300 feet and the Corps continued. Although the site of Lewis' near-death experience is on private property, modern travelers can still



One of MoDOT's responsibilities is marking the Lewis and Clark trail and historical sites.

enjoy several other Missouri locales linked to the explorers. More than 100 of them in fact.

During the months they spent here, Corps members were enchanted by the "butifull" countryside of what would become Missouri. One journal entry by Clark commented on the region's abundance of caves and natural arches. He was also captivated by the bountiful prairies to the west. Unlike the grassy plains east of the Mississippi, Clark found Missouri to be lush with "Hasel Grapes & a wild plumb of Superior quality."



The Corps stopped several times along the banks of the Missouri River. They discovered the Osage-orange tree here. The first eastern wood rat seen by Euro-Americans was documented in present-day Callaway County. Sightings of the now-extinct Carolina parakeets near Kansas City were also mentioned in the journals.

Near Brunswick, Corps member Patrick Gass climbed a hill above camp and was moved to record the event in his personal journal, saying: "This is as handsome a place as I ever saw in an uncultivated state."

To ensure these dozens of Lewis and Clark sites are easy to find, MoDOT is doing one of the things it does best: making signs.

In fact, the department is making two different signs to guide travelers, tourists, visitors and the curious to these locations. One sign marks the land-route equivalent of the Corps river journey, the other sign



William Clark's diary

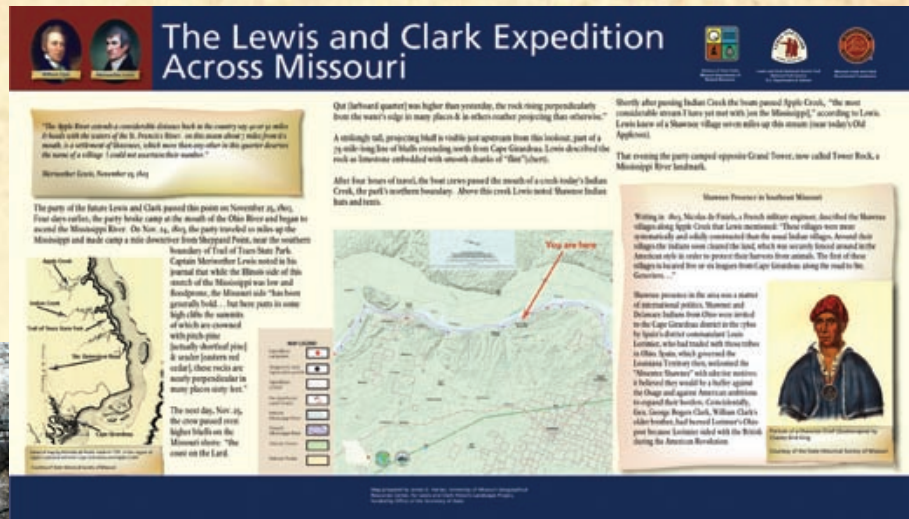
marks access to Lewis and Clark historic sites, interpretive panels and other certified attractions.

To designate official Lewis and Clark trails, MoDOT's sign shop produced the familiar white sign with brown silhouettes pointing in the distance. To mark the access from a trail to a historical site, MoDOT created a sign with a National Park Service logo containing the pointing silhouettes and added the words "Historical Marker."

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The Department of Natural Resources installed interpretive panels like the one on the bank of the Missouri River shown here.

and Mississippi rivers. They'll be installed by the Department of Natural Resources, the Department of Conservation and local communities," Kross said. "The historical marker signs will make them easier for travelers to find."

But pointing out these sites is only part of MoDOT's responsibility. The agency is also mapping the way to them. This year's state map has features to help visitors find and follow the Corps of Discovery route as closely as possible (see page 29).

"In this edition, we've added little symbols showing official Lewis and Clark trails," Kross said. "To help travelers even more, they're actually shading the different highways that follow the trail an orange color on the map. Guidance on the different MoDOT signage is also included."

The 2004 Missouri State Map also features Lewis and Clark on the cover. Painted by artist Gary Lucy, the picture of the two explorers preparing for their journey in St. Louis titled "Lewis and Clark: The Final Briefing at St Charles, May 21, 1804" is featured on the front of the map along with other images related to the journey.

There are currently more than 150 Lewis and Clark commemorative events scheduled throughout Missouri. For information on dates, times and locations go to www.lewisandclarkmo.org. ■

Matt Hiebert is editor of Pathways and an outreach specialist at MoDOT's Central Office.